

Samuel Houston to Andrew Jackson, January 31, 1843, from Correspondence of Andrew Jackson. Edited by John Spencer Bassett.

class=MsoNormal>SAM HOUSTON TO JACKSON. 1

1 Houston has encumbered this letter with two or three hundred superfluous commas and semicolons, so meaningless and so erratically placed as to make its reading very difficult, and often to conceal temporarily his meaning. It has been thought desirable to eliminate such as have this effect.

Washington, 2 January 31, 1843.

2 I. e. , Washington, Texas, the capital of that republic, of which Houston was now for the second time president.

Venerated Friend , A multiplicity of concerns has prevented me from writing to you of the times, since I had the pleasure of seeing you in Tennessee. It has not been for a want of inclination; nor has it been that I believed it would be considered irksome by you to peruse my letters. The many and continued regards, which you have kindly evinced towards me for the last twenty seven years, and the undiminished confidence reposed in me, are circumstances which have instructed me in the assurance that you entertain for me that solicitude which will induce sufficient care for me to desire a knowledge of the success which may betide me, as an individual, and a man engaged in the amelioration and improvement of the condition of mankind.

No one can more understandingly appreciate such efforts than yourself, who have been engaged, for more than half a century, in the most arduous labours, and constantly opposed by obstacles of every variety of character. You have surmounted all; and in

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retirement enjoy a nations gratitude for the matchless benefits which your forecast and patriotism have conferred upon it, and to this is added the admiration of mankind! You are truly rich in earthly blessings, and I most devoutly hope that the Great dispenser of Heavenly rewards will grant you an everlasting recompense!

I have often reflected upon the trials through which you have passed; and admired the firmness with which you met and triumphed over opposition. Recently, I have seen from your pen a manly and conclusive vindication of your conduct during the defence of New Orleans and subsequent events! If the "Kentuckian" has any shame, he has abundant reason to blush for his foul slanders against you! Whilst you were in the way of aspirants, such things were to be looked for, but when retired to the Hermitage, and in delicate health, I had hoped, for the honor of my native land, that the quiver of malice and detraction had become empty.

Your persecutors are determined to pursue you to the last; and if they could, they would administer to you "vinegar mingled with gall." I commend the course pursued by you in this case, as it has presented many facts of history which were not before known to the world! I trust from the masterly vindication, that no base or anonymous slanderer will ever violate the sanctuary of your reputation or repose!

Who ever undertakes to do right in a corrupt or degenerate age, or in the midst of factions, demagogues, or unprincipled aspirants, may expect to pay the forfeit of their repose. No man deserves the name nor the reward of a patriot, who is not willing to hazard every thing for his country, and if necessary to perish for or with it, rather than to drag out a humiliating existence!

Peculiar circumstances influence the course of every man whose duty it is to discharge high and important delegated trusts; but if he is an honest man, he will never yield principle to expediency, in the hope that by some fortunate chance he may be enabled to repair the injury which he has inflicted upon his country, by a wish to conciliate his enemies or

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temporize for the sake of harmony! To surrender a constitution to tamperers, for plans by which they may gain power to subvert principles, or to the excitement of a populace actuated by demagogues, I regard as an act of foul Treason; And he whose duty it is to preserve the charter of his country's freedom, and yields to such influences I esteem either a dastard or a Traitor. I regret to entertain the impression, that every day lessens the veneration which men and politicians have heretofore entertained, or at least professed, for Constitutions! Once they were held in veneration, second, only to Holy writ; but now they are derided by many openly, and new theories set up in their place. Statesmen alone can appreciate them, and are willing to rely upon them as the only saving principle of self-government. The absurd doctrine is now openly advocated by many that Legislatures have the right, not only to exercise the powers plainly delegated to them by the constitution, but they have likewise the right to exercise all powers not expressly prohibited by the Constitution, Thus destroying all the checks and balances of free government, and throwing into the hands of the Legislative Department all the coordinate powers of Government. This to my mind is more dangerous to Liberty than an assumption by either of the other Departments of Government. For if either of the others should attempt to assume, or actually assume a power or powers not granted, the people would easily become awakened to a sense of the danger to which their Liberties were subject! Because they are not regarded so immediately connected with the people as the Legislative Department, and are in their character more responsible! The members of Congress, being more numerous than the other departments, do not individually incur a proportionate degree of responsibility! What a legislature does is done by many, or rather by no one, but what is done by either of the remaining Departments can be readily ascertained, promulgated, and the transgressor identified!

Assemblies and deliberative Bodies have often destroyed liberty, but no individual, while deliberative bodies have remained honest and incorruptible, has ever overthrown the liberties of any people. And I much doubt if it was ever attempted! Cataline, though unsuccessful, no doubt had many friends in the Roman Senate. Caesar and Pompey

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both had their adherents, and the corruptions and factions of the senate of Rome invited Caesar to enslave his country. Cromwell owed his elevation to a corrupt Parliament, and Napoleon, to the oppressions and misconduct of the assembly of France was indebted for his power! I have recently seen a display of the danger, but it has passed by! If ever the U. States do, and they must, change their form of Government, it will be owing to the assumption of powers by the congress, and the frequency of elections, which open so wide a field to demagogues, for all their infamous practices! I regard all Republicks as subject to similar catastrophe's! We may desire that period to be far removed from our day, when such results must take place, and surely every patriot will cherish a hope that such may never be the case; But when we look through past ages, and contemplate the present tendency of the affairs of nations, we cannot but entertain many painful apprehensions for our country's safety. Demagogues are the agents of mischief, and "a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump." When the mass of a nation becomes either slavish in spirit or corrupt in principle the friends of Liberty are silenced. To you General, I feel myself vastly indebted for many principles, which I have never abandoned thro' life. One is a holy love of country, and a willingness to make every sacrifice to its honor and safety! Next a sacred regard for its constitution and laws, with an eternal hostility and opposition to all Banks!

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Now Sir I beseech you to feel assured, that no policy, expediency, fear, or whim, shall ever cause a departure from these principles, but that I will cherish them while life endures, or I am capable of feeling one grateful emotion for your many acts of affectionate kindness to me, under all circumstances and in every vicissitude of life in which you have known me! I will not close this long letter without assuring you that I entertain confidence in the speedy success of Texas, if I am sustained in carrying out a wise policy—To live within our means—act defensively—cultivate our rich land—raise a revenue from import duties

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—make and keep peace with the Indians, and if possible, get peace with Mexico. In the meantime, watch her, be prepared, and if an army invades us, never to let them return!

Mrs. Houston unites with me in most affectionate wishes and prayers for continued health and happiness!

Thy Devoted Friend